

HABS
MO
48-KAT
4-

Kansas City City Hall
414 East 12th Street
Kansas City
Jackson County
Missouri

HABS No. MO-266

P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

AMERICA'S CITY HALLSHABS
MO
48-KANS
4-NAME: Kansas City, Missouri, City HallLOCATION: The building and its plaza occupy the city block in downtown Kansas City bounded by Oak Street on the west, 11th Street on the north, Locust Street on the east and 12th Street on the south.

414 East 12th St Lebanon

PRESENT OWNER: City of Kansas City, MissouriPRESENT OCCUPANT: City of Kansas City, MissouriPRESENT USE: Municipal Offices and meeting rooms for the City Council and management staff.SIGNIFICANCE: The City Hall is the tallest and most obvious of a three building construction program passed in 1931 by the people of Kansas City. The overall bond program was labeled the "Ten-Year Plan", and offered the vision of stability, progress and faith in the future to counter the effects of the Great Depression. The building's architecture, though neo-classic or beaux-arts in plan and massing, introduces the elements of the "moderne" or "art deco" movement in its detail and ornament.PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATIONA. PHYSICAL HISTORY

1. The building was built over twenty-two months and dedicated on October 25, 1937. Sources of information include articles and photographs from the "Kansas City Star".
2. The Architects were Wight and Wight, with Ervin Pfuhl as structural engineer and William L. Cassell as mechanical engineer. Original tracings of the working drawings are available in the archives of the City Architect. All three principal design firms were local Kansas City professionals.
3. The total project cost, including land acquisition and professional fees, was slightly over \$5million. Separate construction contracts were issued for various phases of the work, with the major contractors listed below.

Excavation and Foundations

Norton Brothers \$ 92,394.

General Construction

Swenson Construction Company 1,497,989.

Plumbing

George R. Jorgenson 63,456.

Heating and Ventilating

U.S. Engineering Company 105,050.

Interior and Exterior Finishing

Swenson Construction Company 94,987.

Fixtures

Livers Bronze

\$ 38,365.

The major construction contracts carried specified project durations, submitted by the bidders as part of their proposals. Norton's bid for excavation and foundations stipulated 65 calendar days, while Swenson's bid for general construction obligated him to 280 calendar days, rather impressive for a thirty-story building, even with today's improved equipment.

4. The building's appearance remains today as it was upon completion, with only minor changes in site development and landscaping.

B. HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

This new City Hall embodied the tangible proof of the political effectiveness of Kansas City's Democratic machine, led by Thomas "Boss" Pendergast and his hand-picked City Manager, H. F. McElroy. This building would serve as the symbol of pride and power that the citizenry had proven willing to bestow on its political leaders. Under Mayor Bryce Smith and Councilmen D. S. Adams, Freeman Alford, Frank H. Backstrom, Charles H. Clark, Frank M. Eviston, Ruby D. Garrett, A. N. Gossett and James B. Shoemaker, the City government undertook this gargantuan project to provide a seat of local government "adequate for future decades".

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. DESCRIPTION OF EXTERIOR:

A "skyscraper" tower, 123.5 feet by 97 feet in plan, rises 30 stories from a six-story base 201 feet by 128 feet. The top floor, which provides an observation deck around its perimeter, is 443 feet above the sidewalk. The building's location, on a natural high point, makes its twenty-ninth floor Mayor and City Manager offices the highest office space in the State of Missouri.

The tower is symmetrical about both north-south and east-west axes, with an architectural expression which emphasizes its verticality. The Indiana limestone exterior is interrupted in vertical bands of dark bronze spandrel panels between the windows. At the top floor of the six-story base, windows are replaced with a frieze of relief sculptures depicting early settlement and growth of the Kansas City area. The design concept for the friezes was developed by the architects, Wight and Wight, and executed by three sculptors working on different elevations: C.P. Jennewein, south; Ulric H. Ellerhusen, east and west; and Walker Hancock, north.

The structure is a steel frame, encased in concrete.

B. DESCRIPTION OF INTERIOR:

The building's interior finishes represent the best available for institutional and functional use at the time. With the exception of the main lobby, the Council Chamber and the Mayor and City Manager

offices, " no attempt at extensive ornamentation has been made. Offices and corridors are plain, businesslike and unpretentious."

Floors are terrazzo, walls are plaster on structural clay tile, ceilings are plaster, with decorative cornice and polychromatic, but subtle, paint finishes. Most floors are served by six high speed elevators, with only four cars continuing past the twenty-sixth floor. Elevator lobbies are large and connect to an east-west corridor at the south end. Typical available "tenant" space in the tower is 7500 square feet/floor.

C. SITE

The building's primary axis is north-south, with the building mass at the north end of the block and a large formal, ceremonial plaza development complete with steps, fountains and pools cascading southward down a natural slope of the land toward 12th Street and the Jackson County Court House and Office Building on the same axis, and in the same architectural style, across the street. Under the plaza is a parking garage for 140 cars.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original contract documents are available in the City Architect's office, 17th floor, City Hall.

B. Bibliography

1. Kansas City Public Library, Missouri Valley Room. Various clippings and other publications dealing with the construction, dedication and occupancy of City Hall.
2. Kansas City Missouri
An Architectural History
1826-1976
by George Ehrlich, 1979
Published by Historic Kansas City Foundation
Kansas City, Missouri

C. Likely Sources not yet Investigated:

Dr. George Ehrlich, University of Missouri, Kansas City, has compiled a great deal of research on local architecture and particularly on the construction of the Depression era projects.

Prepared by Thomas R. Bean, AIA
City Architect
Kansas City, Missouri
August 27, 1981